

February 25, 2021

The Honorable
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the nearly six million Farm Bureau member families across the United States, we write in strong opposition to H.R. 803, the Protecting America's Wilderness and Public Lands Act. Collectively this package of bills impacts lands in California, Colorado, Arizona and Washington by creating nearly 1.5 million acres of new wilderness, the most restrictive federal land use classification. Additionally, it would designate 1,200 miles of wild and scenic rivers and create 110,000 acres of National Monument expansion. Further, many of the wilderness and wild and scenic river designations contained in this bill are not suitable for these restrictive designations. To declare areas that do not possess these characteristics undermines the integrity of the Wilderness Act and the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act as well as the lands that possess those features.

Farmers and ranchers rely on federal forests and rangelands for economic and recreational opportunities. Livestock grazing on federal lands forms an integral part of ranching operations across the United States, especially in the West. But farmers also use national forests and rangelands throughout the United States in a variety of other ways. Federal lands throughout the country are important components of our nation's watersheds that provide water to a large number of Americans. Active land management practices such as timber production and livestock grazing are critical to protect against wildland fires which devastate range resources, damage watersheds, threaten wildlife and put rural communities at great risk.

American farmers and ranchers have a genuine interest in healthy and productive federal forest and rangelands. At the same time, we have a genuine interest in seeing lands managed in an environmentally sound manner. Farmers and ranchers understand and appreciate that active management of our federal lands is critical to the long-term viability of the ecosystem, the resource, and the communities they support. Designations included in H.R. 803 threaten multiple use areas by prohibiting the employment of motorized tools and mechanized vehicles in watershed management, trail maintenance, soil treatment, noxious weed control, waste management and fire protection.

Our nation's federal forests are facing serious threats from fires, insects and disease due to a lack of active forest management. The poor health of our federal forests also threatens wildlife populations and neighboring non-federal lands, as well as the vitality of rural, forested communities across the country. A vibrant livestock and forest products industry helps diversify rural economies in ways that compliment ranching and agricultural operations. Wilderness and National Monument designations eliminate federal land management agencies ability to effectively protect against the threat of catastrophic wildland fire.

Farmers, landowners, and grazing permittees should be fully involved as affected partners in any process to execute federal land use designations which restrict public use and access. Federal land use designations that lack local stakeholder input from agricultural and resource management professionals often generates significant controversy and economic hardship at the local level. The detrimental effects of a federal land use designation frequently causes residents, elected state and county officials, and local stakeholders significant reductions in economic activity and the loss of jobs in rural communities. Past designations have also affected water rights, public lands grazing and access to State and private lands.

Farm Bureau supports the multiple-use concept of federal lands, recognizing that definable land areas have dominant-use capability, which should be recognized with the concept of multiple uses without the total exclusion of other uses. The Protecting America's Wilderness and Public Lands Act stands in clear violation of AFBF policy. Additionally, the California, Colorado, Arizona and Washington Farm Bureau's oppose passage of this legislation.

Farm Bureau urges you to oppose passage of H.R. 803, the Protecting America's Wilderness and Public Lands Act.

Sincerely,

American Farm Bureau Federation
Arizona Farm Bureau
California Farm Bureau
Colorado Farm Bureau
Washington Farm Bureau